



# News & Views

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## 2004 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Dear friends,

The 2004 Legislative session started January 12. One of my top priorities this year is continuing to **ease our state's regulatory burden on employers**. Last year we moved in that direction by making major improvements to our state's costly unemployment insurance system. We also made a small but significant fix to workers' compensation. But we still have a long way to go. It is more important than ever to create an environment where new investment can flourish. While the emphasis is to create new job opportunities, I am just as concerned about keeping the jobs we have by supporting employers who already call Washington home. That's why this session I will push for more reforms that will make our regulatory environment less costly and cumbersome, and make Washington more competitive and attractive for job providers.

I will also continue to focus this year on **issues important to the 6th District**, including a package of legislation I've introduced to address Spokane's continuing problem with methamphetamines and to increase our personal safety.

Please don't hesitate to contact me during the session to let me know your thoughts on issues before the Legislature. I also welcome your ideas regarding specific problems and issues you would like to see addressed. And, if you are having difficulty with a state agency and would like assistance, please let me know.

Thank you for the honor of representing you. I look forward to hearing your views.

Sincerely,

# 2004 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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## Easing regulations that are killing our state

For the last 10 years, **regulations have ranked as the biggest problem area** for Washington's small businesses. A single business owner with no employees must comply with 35 sets of regulations from 18 different local, state and federal agencies. If that business creates *one* additional job, they must comply with 58 sets of regulations enforced by 28 different agencies – altogether making more than 100,000 regulatory requirements.

That's simply too much to ask from any one individual working to provide for his or her family – and that's why I am determined to **make it easier to do business in Washington**.

This session House Republicans are putting the entire **worker's compensation system** – including the reason rates have risen nearly 39 percent in just two years – under the microscope.

I am also looking at ways to slow our state's ballooning **minimum wage requirements**. Today Washington employers pay the highest minimum wage rate in the nation. As a result employers are cutting jobs and businesses are moving to other states – a trend that we must stop. This year House Republicans are also promoting legislation to rein in **over-burdensome regulations** and the state agencies that impose them. I want to position our state for a strong and quick economic recovery – and create needed jobs and prosperity for families.

## Reasonable tort reform: Why it's important to you

Many people think of tort reform in terms of the medical industry. And it's no wonder: escalating medical malpractice premiums are forcing some health care providers to close their doors. But the same holds true for almost every other industry. Employers everywhere are **struggling to pay rising premiums** to protect themselves from liability.

In two recent independent studies, 75 percent of Washington voters surveyed believe awards for non-economic damages (i.e., pain and suffering) have become excessive, and 72 percent support limiting those award amounts. Nearly 60 percent said they believe the rising number and size of personal injury lawsuits being filed are hurting the economy and making Washington a less attractive place to do

business. Fifty-six percent describe the issue of medical malpractice in Washington today as a crisis or major problem.

The Legislature is in a position to do something about this problem by creating a **fairer tort system**. In 2003 the Senate passed, but the House failed to seriously consider, tort reform measures that would have helped, for example, bring down the cost of insurance for doctors and small employers. This year I remain committed to implementing these much-needed reforms.

## Protecting our kids from school strikes

It is against the law for school teachers to go on strike. But that didn't stop Marysville teachers and their unions from holding their community hostage last year for 49 days – the longest school strike in Washington's history. It was a stark reminder of how labor disputes in public institutions take their **toll on children and families**.

This year I have introduced a bill called the "Protecting Students' Education Act" that I believe will give the two sides a strong incentive to work things out at the bargaining table *before* going on strike.

Under my proposal, if teachers go on strike for even one day, parents in that school district can get a **voucher** to send their child – for the full remainder of that school year – to any private school or school in another district (provided students are accepted) at **state expense**.

I believe Washington has some of the **finest teachers in the nation**, and I support their commitment to our children. But strikes are detrimental to students' welfare and academic well-being. I believe my measure will help students, families – *and* teachers, especially those who feel pressured to participate in strikes even though they are personally against such an idea.



# 2004 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

## Putting crime in the cross-hairs

Your level of safety affects everything you do, from walking freely around your neighborhood to your level of comfort at home. To make sure we are as safe as we can be, I am championing three bills this session to make us safer:

- Meth continues to be a significant problem in Spokane and across Washington. Last year I was prime sponsor of a bill to **increase penalties for manufacturing methamphetamine**, making it a Class A felony and a “strike” under the three strikes law, and increasing the maximum prison term to 20 years. The law didn’t pass, but I am proposing it again this year.
- I have also introduced a bill requiring stores that sell products containing ingredients used to make meth in smaller packages. This would **stop meth makers** from stocking up on the materials they need to cook up their deadly drugs.
- Finally, I will again push legislation – introduced but not passed last year – that would **remove the statute of limitations for all sex offenders**, giving law enforcement stronger prosecution tools.

It’s time for us to take a more serious stand against these crimes. Our quality of life depends on it.



*Although this session we’re meeting in temporary quarters while the Capitol building is under repair, next year we expect to be back onto the original House floor, seen here.*

## Keep up with the 2004 Legislature in Olympia

### Watch the Legislature in action:

- TVW, a nonprofit public affairs network, broadcasts the Legislature on cable television throughout the state. For programming call 360-586-5555, or visit [www.tvw.org](http://www.tvw.org)

### Know the legislative process:

- Go to the House of Representative’s web site: [www.leg.wa.gov/house/](http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/)
- Click on “General Info”
- There you will find the “Guide to Effective Legislative Participation” and information about the law-making process

### Check the status of bills:

- Go to the Legislature’s web site: [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)
- Click on “Bill Info”
- There you will find a host of information relating to each bill passing through the Legislature

### Check out our priorities:

- Visit <http://hrc.leg.wa.gov> for information about the House Republican Caucus and our 2004 priorities



# 2004 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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## Contact Me!

Legislators are elected not only to represent you, but also to serve you. If you are facing challenges working with a state agency, please contact me for help. I also appreciate your feedback about legislation I am sponsoring or issues you would like to see me address in the Legislature.

I would also be happy to speak to your group, organization or school. Topics might include:


- Issues before the Legislature
- How does the legislative process work?
- What it's like to be a legislator
- Issues specific to the 6th Legislative District

**See my contact information on the front page. I look forward to hearing from you!**



### Inside:

- Reasonable tort reform
- Fewer regulations = better business climate
- Specific proposals for 2004
- Keeping up with the 2004 Legislature

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*John*  
State Representative

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